

## **OTATARA LANDCARE GROUP**

Chairperson report for the 12 months ending March 31 2025

The Otatara Landcare Group had another very good year of progress and achievement in the 12 months under review. Others will be reporting on individual areas of work, so I will focus on a few matters of some significance.

### **AWARDS**

In June 2024, Kathy Morrison and Douglas Black received civic awards from the Invercargill City Council in the Environmental and Social Wellbeing category through their voluntary work at Bush Haven. While Bush Haven is a separate trust, it is very much a part of the Otatara Landcare Group 'family'. This award was very well deserved and appropriate, as they both put in many, many hours of work to rescue and rehabilitate injured native birds, with the help of others too. It was good to see Bush Haven recognized.

In October, the Otatara Landcare Group won the 'Environmental Action in the Community' award in the Environment Southland community awards scheme. The citation read: 'The Otatara Landcare Group is a more than 200-strong community group overseeing great environmental work in New River Estuary, Sandy Point and Oreti Beach.

The citation read: 'Advocating for the preservation and enhancement of forest remnants and other natural values of the Otatara area, the group promotes increased use of native plants, while also improving habitat for local native wildlife.

'The group also runs activities to improve knowledge of the local environment, hosts working bees, and promotes Otatara's natural areas to locals and visitors'.

The award recognized the past and present work of hundreds of volunteers giving thousands of hours in caring for Otatara's precious environment and the restoration work at Bushy Point. The awards scheme and the winners presented an inspiring diversity of environmental action in our region, from individuals, non-profits to businesses large and small, farmers to catchment groups, schools to the Department of Conservation.

Each story told through the awards was and is deeply inspiring, as we understood and celebrated how much is happening in the environmental space in Southland, mostly and usually under the radar.

And for 28 years Environment Southland has been holding the awards scheme and encouraging and assessing nominations. Long may this continue.

I think of the sheer joy of the children from the Heddon Bush School when they won the award for environmental action in education and how important it is to be raising up the next generation of environmental leaders.

For the Otatara Landcare Group, the nomination, the judging panel's visit to Bushy Point, and the winning of the award for Environmental Action in the Community brought great encouragement

The award refocused attention on the reforestation work at Bushy Point and in the wider Otatara area, gave the many volunteers a wider recognition and a real boost and huge encouragement in what they do, strengthened or created new links with other

environmental community groups and reminded us that the work of the landcare group is important and valued.

We also appreciated the sponsorship of MW Environmental - it was very good to meet Renee Richardson, the director, and to look at how we can continue that relationship.

#### FUNDING FOR BUSHY POINT

At the 2024 AGM, I reported that funding from the Department of Conservation Community Fund for Bushy Point had reached its 3 year limit. Thanks to the hard work of a small team of OLG committee members, a successful application was made to the Environment Enhancement Fund of Environment Southland for \$20 000. This has enabled the landcare group to continue operations at Bushy Point for another year. Our costs are mainly for weed management, pest control and the purchase of trees and plants for the annual planting day as well as mowing, track and machinery maintenance. This is supported by hundreds of hours of volunteer time.

The fundraising team is now actively looking for new funding, and applications are being worked on. Success is not guaranteed but the Otatara Landcare Group has a solid reputation for doing a lot with a little, which we believe is in our favour.

#### OTATARA SCHOOL

During the year, meetings were held with the leadership of Otatara School to map out areas for cooperation. This led to 136 students planting about 170 plants at Bushy Point in early September. Further meetings have taken place this year to plan further co-operation between the school and the OLG.

#### MOU WITH THE ICC

During the year, much work went into the writing up of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Parks and Recreation Department of the Invercargill City Council, relating to predator control work on ICC reserves in Otatara by volunteers with Otatara Pestbusters. This proved surprisingly complex but was finally concluded and signed last month, April. Thank you to Dallas Bradley, who heads up Otatara Pestbusters, for his work and patience in getting the MOU over the line!

#### NEW CONSTITUTION

This evening members will be asked to approve a new constitution for the Otatara Landcare Group. All existing not-for-profit incorporate societies must re-register under a new Incorporated Societies Act by 5 April 2026 or face removal from the register and loss of legal status. We are required to create and approve a new constitution at our 2025 AGM and submit it for approval. This has been a time-consuming process, but grateful thanks to Barry Smith, who drove the process, and those who worked with him to produce the draft you have received.

## PIGEON POST MAGAZINE

Funding cuts meant reducing the frequency of publication from four issues to two issues a year. MW Environmental, sponsors of the ES community award won by OLG, were happy for us to use their prize of \$1 200 to go towards the Summer issue of Pigeon Post. A winter issue is currently being worked on, but ongoing financial support is needed for this important means of communication with Otatara to continue.

## PEOPLE

During the year, Graeme Childs, our long-time committee member and ever-helpful volunteer and photographer, passed away. He is much missed by his wife Beverley, family and the Otatara Landcare Group.

At last year's AGM, Chris Rance stepped back as secretary after 24 years in this very important role. Thank you Chris, for all you did as our secretary, but I am very pleased to tell you that Chris continues to be a much-valued committee member and volunteer at Bushy Point. Thank you to Lloyd Esler, who took on the role of secretary, relinquishing his role of treasurer – thank you Lloyd, for your time as treasurer! Very much appreciated. And thank you to Jeff Walker, who agreed to join the committee as treasurer. Jeff is a great addition to the committee and thank you Jeff, for your expertise and time.

At the beginning of this year, Barry Smith announced he would retire as caretaker of Bushy Point, with effect from the end of March. It is hard to imagine Bushy Point without Barry - he has been caretaker for 25 years, and has shepherded Bushy Point from bare paddocks with remnant native forest to today's award-winning project. Just last week, Barry planted the 37 000<sup>th</sup> plant, a totara, and he has had a hand in the planting of those 37 000 plants in one way or another.

Fortunately, Barry is continuing to be part of the Bushy Point story as a volunteer, for which all his colleagues on the committee are exceptionally grateful!

## 25<sup>th</sup> ANNIVERSARY

This year, the Otatara Landcare Group marks 25 years since its inception. The inception date was May 5, but the celebration will be held in October, in conjunction with planting and tree releasing activities. More later!

Finally, all this is not possible without the hard work of so many volunteers.

I appreciate this whakataukī or proverb.

Kahore taku toa I te toa taki tahi, engari, he toa takitini.

We cannot succeed without the support of those around us

Thank you.